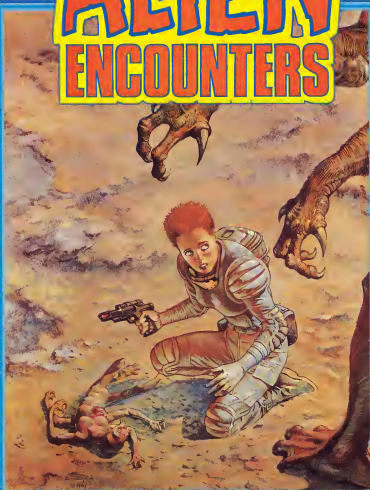


ALIEN ENCOUNTERS



THE BUSTER CRABBE COLLECTOR

LESTER LOUD WAS LIKE A HUMAN CASH REGISTER. WHEN HE TALKED ABOUT HIS COLLECTION OF TWENTIETH CENTURY MEMORABILIA, IT WAS EASY TO IMAGINE HIS MIND BEEPING AS IT READ OFF THE PRICE CODES, HIS EYES FLASHING GREEN LIGHTS AS HE REGURGITATED THE OFF-QUOTED FIGURES.

THAT'S MY NEWEST FIND, JOY! IT COST ME FIVE THOUSAND CREDNOTES -- AND IT'S WORTH IT! WHEN I SELL ALL THIS SOME DAY, IT'LL BRING TEN, MAYBE FIFTEEN!

I LIKE IT, LESTER. IT'S SO HOKEY AND SO CUTE.

STORY: JACK BUTTERWORTH
ART: JOHN RIDGWAY
LETTERS: ANNIE HALFACREE
COLORS: SAM PARSONS

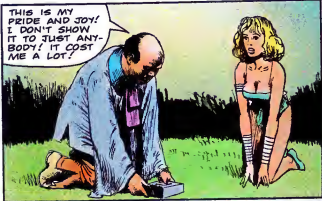
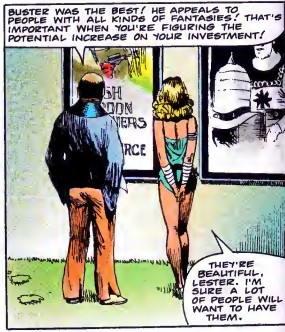
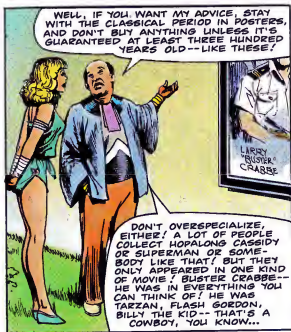
"HOKEY AND CUTE!" THAT, MY DEAR, IS WHY I'VE HIRED YOU AS MY TENNIS COACH AND NOT MY FINANCIAL ADVISOR! SINCE THEY STARTED BUILDING HOMES WITHOUT WINDOWS IN THE LATE 1900'S, THE PRICES ON THESE THINGS HAVE GONE THROUGH THE ROOF!

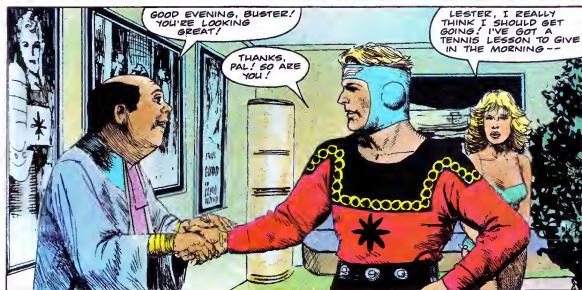
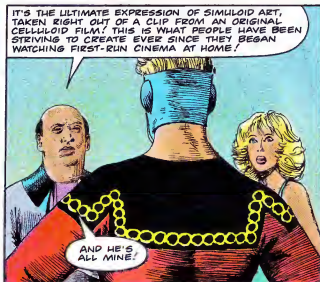
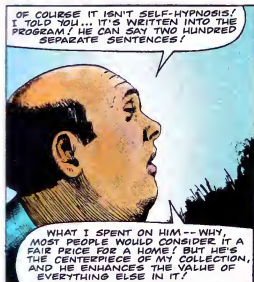
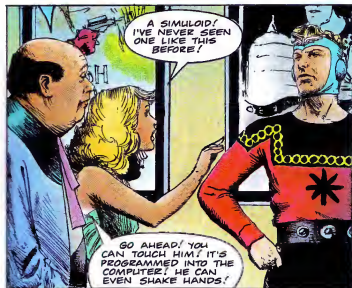
BUT AREN'T YOU WORRIED ABOUT HAVING ALL THAT MONEY INVESTED IN PAPER? AFTER ALL, A FIRE OR FLOOD --

I'VE INSURED ALL THIS "HOKEY AND CUTE" STUFF FOR THREE TIMES ITS BOOK VALUE! NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS--DISASTER OR THEFT--I MAKE MONEY!

I'M SURE I COULD LEARN A LOT ABOUT MONEY FROM YOU, LESTER!







JOY, DON'T GO YET!
ASK BUSTER A QUESTION!
HE'LL TALK TO YOU!

LOOK, LESTER,
I DON'T KNOW
ANYTHING ABOUT
ACTORS.



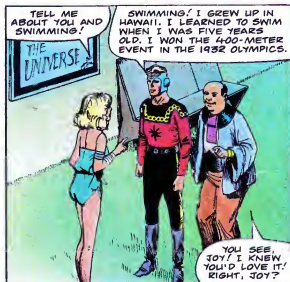
ACTOR! YOU KNOW, WHEN PEOPLE
POINTED ME OUT, THEY NEVER SAID,
"THERE GOES BUSTER CRABBE THE
ACTOR." FOR YEARS, IT WAS ALWAYS
"THERE GOES BUSTER CRABBE
THE SWIMMER."

A
SWIMMER?!



TELL ME
ABOUT YOU AND
SWIMMING!

SWIMMING! I GREW UP IN
HAWAII. I LEARNED TO SWIM
WHEN I WAS FIVE YEARS
OLD. I WON THE 400-METER
EVENT IN THE 1932 OLYMPICS.



YOU SEE,
JOY! I KNEW
YOU'D LOVE IT!
RIGHT, JOY?

I LOVE
TO SWIM.

SO DO I!
I WISH I COULD
SWIM NOW, BUT
I CAN'T!



HEY! WHAT'S
HE SAYING? THAT'S
NOT IN HIS
PROGRAM!

LESTER, CAN'T
WE TAKE HIM
SWIMMING?

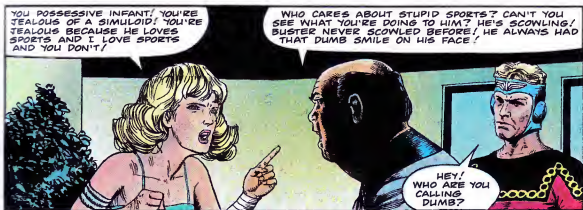


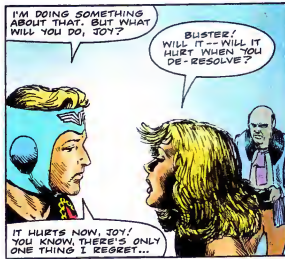
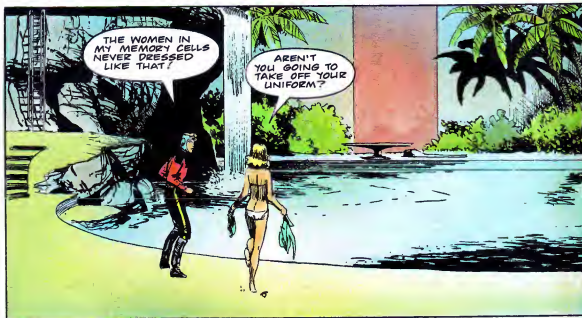
OF COURSE NOT!
ARE YOU CRAZY!
SIMULOIDS CAN'T
GO IN THE WATER!
HE'D BE DESTROYED!

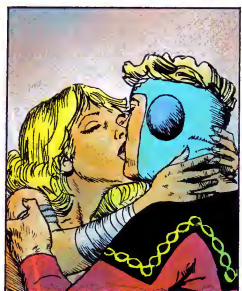
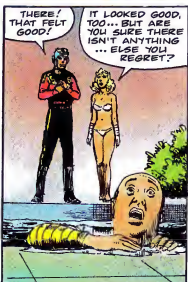
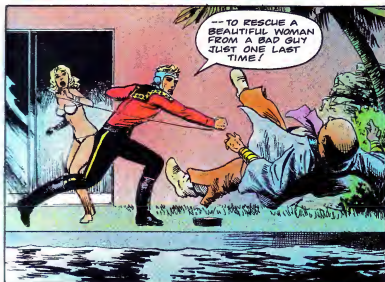
WHEN I BOUGHT THIS
GUY, I WAS WARNED
THAT HIS PROGRAM IS
SO COMPLICATED THAT
STRONG HUMAN FEELINGS
MIGHT SCREW IT UP!
YOU'RE DOING SOME-
THING TO HIM WITH THIS
AFFECTION CRAP!

STOP THAT RIGHT
NOW! YOU'RE WRECKING
MY PROPERTY! YOU'RE
CHANGING HIM!



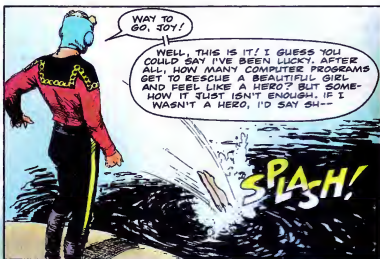








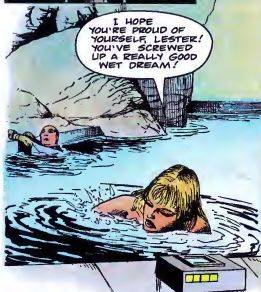
AND NOW IT'S TIME TO FIND FREEDOM... YOU KNOW, I'M NOT PROGRAMMED TO DO THIS. I HOPE I HIT THE WATER!



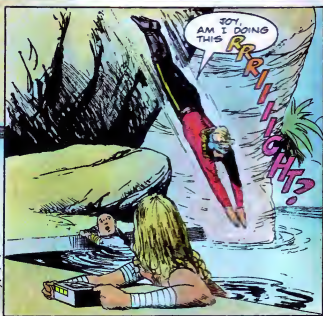
WAY TO GO, JOY!

WELL, THIS IS IT! I GUESS YOU COULD SAY I'VE BEEN LUCKY. AFTER ALL, HOW MANY COMPUTER PROGRAMS GET TO RESCUE A BEAUTIFUL GIRL AND FEEL LIKE A HERO? BUT SOMEHOW IT JUST ISN'T ENOUGH. IF I WASN'T A HERO, I'D SAY SH--

SPLASH!

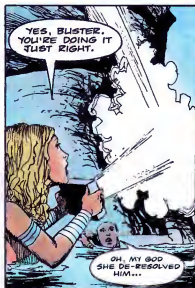


I HOPE YOU'RE PROUD OF YOURSELF, LESTER! YOU'VE SCREWED UP A REALLY GOOD WET DREAM!



JOY, AM I DOING THIS RIGHT?

RRRIIIGHT?



YES, BUSTER, YOU'RE DOING IT JUST RIGHT.



STOP! YOU'RE STEALING MY BOX!


I'M MAKING MONEY FOR YOU, LESTER! YOU BROUGHT YOUR SIMULOID TO THE POOL, AND SOMEONE HIT YOU OVER THE HEAD AND STOLE IT!

WHY, IF YOU MAKE YOUR INSURANCE CLAIM TONIGHT, BY THE TIME THE FACTORY MAKES YOU A NEW BUSTER, YOU'LL HAVE THREE TIMES WHAT THIS DEFECTIVE BABY IS WORTH!



AND ME... I'LL HAVE MY HERO! WHY, IF ALL IT TAKES TO RE-RESOLVE HIM IS AFFECTION, I CAN HARDLY WAIT...

END



THERE IS A STORY
THAT HAS NEVER
BEEN TOLD...

A STORY OF PERFECT
SPHERES THAT DRIFTED
THROUGH SPACE LIKE
IDEAS THROUGH THE
MIND OF A PAINTER...

THE STORY OF THE CHILD-
REN OF THE SPHERES,
WHO BUILT A WORLD OF
BEAUTY THAT PUT THEIR
SHINING SUN TO SHAME--

THE STORY OF THEIR ARRIVAL ON
EARTH, LIKE THE SUN SHINING
THROUGH THE ICICLES--

--AND THE HIDEOUS
WARS THEY FOUGHT
TO KEEP THEIR WORLD
THAT SPLIT THEIR
STAR IN HALF.

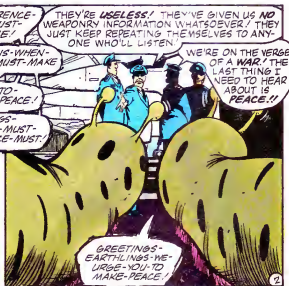
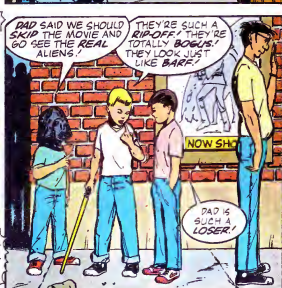
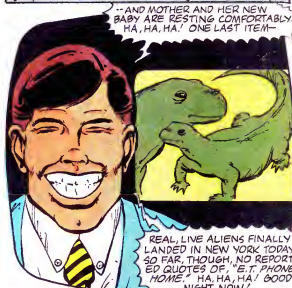
--HOW THEY TAUGHT OUR
ARTISTS NEW COLORS
AND OUR WRITERS NEW
WORDS AND HOW OUR
FARMERS LEARNED TO
FEED THE MULTITUDES.

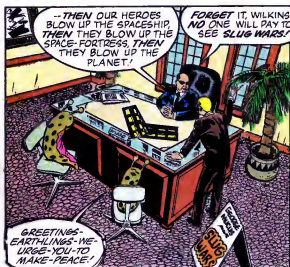
THIS, HOWEVER, IS
NOT THAT STORY.

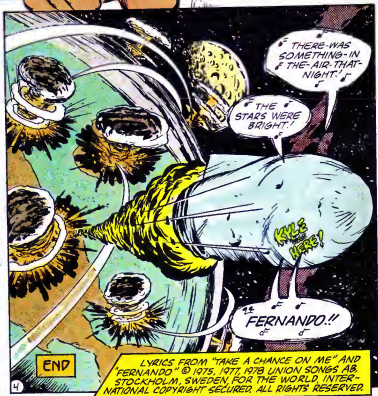
IN OTHER NEWS,
**ALIENS LANDED
TODAY!**

BEPPE SABATINI
WRITER
GRAHAM NOLAN
ARTIST

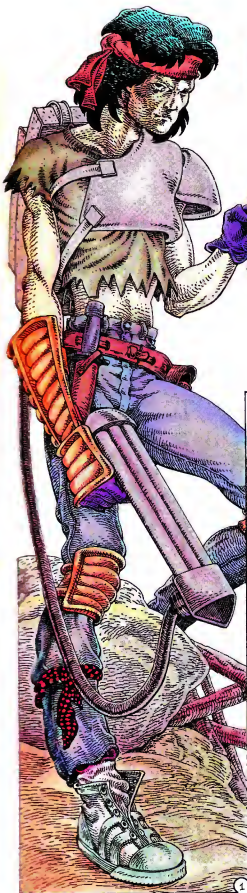
KURT HATHAWAY
LETTERS
MARCUS DAVID
COLOURS







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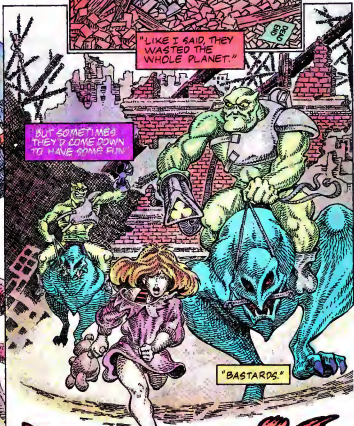
"I WAS JUST A KID WHEN THEY LANDED AND TRASHED THE WHOLE FREAKIN' PLANET."



"I'M FOURTEEN NOW AND A WHOLE LOT SMARTER. GUESS YOU COULD SAY I GREW UP A LOT THE PAST FEW YEARS."

"LIKE I SAID, THEY WASTED THE WHOLE PLANET."

"BUT SOMETIMES THEY'D COME DOWN TO HAVE SOME FUN."



"BASTARDS."

J.D.'S

STORY CHARLES DIXON
LETTERS KURT HATHAWAY

ART THOMAS WIMBIGH
COLORS PHIL DeWALT

I'M THE ONE WITH THE PLASMA RIFLE. MY NAME'S BEAMER. THAT'S NOT THE NAME MY PARENTS GAVE ME, BUT THEY'RE DEAD. SO WHO CARES?

SQUEETS!

GET YOUR ASS DOWN!

OPEN UP ON THEM!

WATCH YOUR AIM, BEAMER!

BRRATTA!
BRR LATA!
BRAA BRRAT

YEAH! THEY'RE HISTORY!

POW!

WY!

WY!

WY!

I DON'T WANNA BE BAIT ANYMORE!
I DON'T LIKE THIS GAME.

STOP CRABBING SQUEETS.

WE'RE NOT GOING TO PLAY THIS GAME ANYMORE.

I'VE THOUGHT OF A BETTER GAME.

"YEAH, I FIGURED IT WAS TIME FOR A NEW GAME."

KRIK!
K-KRIK!

THE ALIENS WERE STUPID. THE OLDEST TRICKS IN THE BOOK WORKED ON THEM. FLEX MADE SOME NOISES AND THEY TURNED THEIR BACKS ON US.

"2'6' 7 1/2" 9"

AFTER THAT IT WAS CAKE!

CLUD!
THUD!
WHACK!

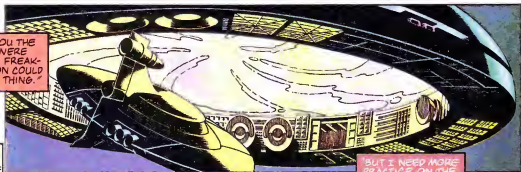
DON'T TOUCH ANYTHING, SQUEETS.

YOU KNOW HOW TO FLY THIS THING?

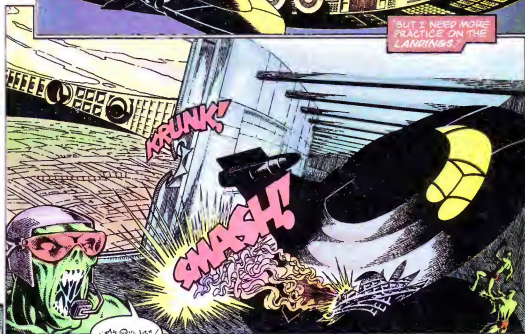
SURE...
GIVE ME A MINUTE.

NEXT STOP...
MOTHER SHIP!

"I TOLD YOU THE ALIENS WERE STUPID. A FREAK-IN' MORON COULD FLY THIS THING."



BUT I NEED MORE PRACTICE ON THE LANDINGS."



WOW!

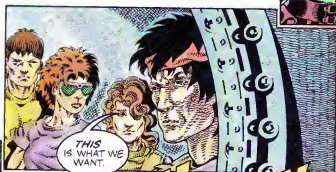


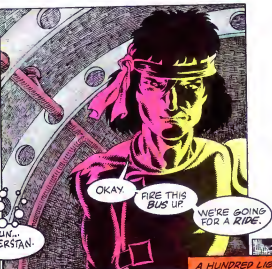
TAKE 'EM DOWN!



C'MON! C'MON!

SPREAD OUT!







END

ALL MY LIFE I'D KNOWN IT WOULD HAPPEN. MY DEAR, SWEET MARK HAD DIED... AND NOW I WAS ALONE. I WASN'T EVEN BORN WHEN MY TWO-THOUSAND SELECT ANCESTORS COLONIZED THIS PLANET THIRTY-TWO YEARS AGO NOW, OUT OF THEM AND THE FEW CHILDREN I'D GROWN UP WITH, I WAS THE ONLY HUMAN LEFT ALIVE ON CANMANDU.

CANMANDU. WHAT A NAME FOR A PLANET. CANMANDU HAD BECOME A LIE. MAN COULDN'T DO. NOT HERE. NOT WITHOUT CHILDREN TO CARRY ON. AFTER THE PLAGUE, EVERY PREGNANCY ON OUR WORLD ENDED IN STILLBIRTH. EVEN MINE. ALL OUR LIVES, MARK AND I NEVER SAW ANYTHING BUT DEATH. WE TRIED TO MAKE A LIFE ANYWAY, BUT THE ONE HOPE WE'VE HAD WAS FUTILE.

STILLBORN

STORY
ERIC DINEHART
PENCILS
TOM LYLE
INKS
ROMEO TANGHAL
LETTERS
KURT HATHAWAY
COLOURS
LOVERN KINDZIERSKI

MARK DANIEL
LANDS
BELOVED HUSBAND
BORN:
JUNE 3, 11 A.L.
DIED:
AUG 19, 32 A.L.

"CANS" DESIGNED BY: B.C. BOYER

I'D DELIVERED A STILLBIRTH TWO DAYS AGO. MY PREGNANCY WAS THE ONLY REASON MARK HAD HUNG ON TO LIFE AS LONG AS HE DID. AND WITHOUT HIM-- AND MY BABY-- IT'D BE ME NEXT...

Whee-
Toot #3

... IN A MONTH MAYBE, NO MORE THAN A YEAR, I'D GO. JUST LIKE MARK. WHAT WAS THERE FOR ME TO HANG ON TO?

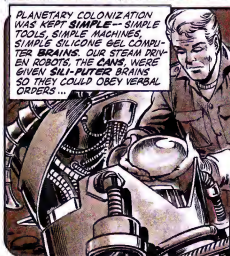


GO TO FARM!
I WANT TO BE ALONE.
GO TO FARM!

TOOT!



THIRTY-TWO YEARS AGO, MY PARENTS AND THE OTHERS WERE LEFT HERE. THEY CAME FROM EARTH IN STASIS, IN A SLOWER-THAN-LIGHT SEEDER. THE NEXT STARSHIP WILL CIRCUIT BY CANMANDU ABOUT 60 A.L., SIXTY YEARS AFTER FIRST LANDING.

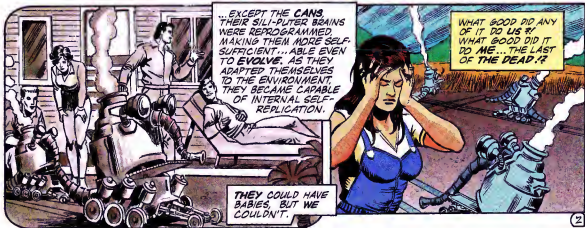


PLANETARY COLONIZATION WAS KEPT SIMPLE--SIMPLE TOOLS, SIMPLE MACHINES, SIMPLE SILICONE GEL COMPUTER BRAINS. OUR STEAM-DRIVEN ROBOTS, THE CANS, WERE GIVEN SILI-PUTER BRAINS SO THEY COULD OBEY VERBAL ORDERS...

...AND CARRY GOODS ALONG THEIR RAPIDLY EXPANDING LINE OF MAGNETIC TRACK.



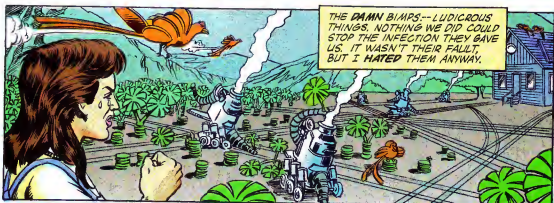
I WAS THE COLONY'S LAST BIRTH BEFORE THE BIMP-PLAGUE HIT TWENTY YEARS AGO. I GREW UP WATCHING BUILDINGS AND PEOPLE DETERIORATE. NO CURE FOUND. NO HOPE OF RESCUE. EVERYTHING OF OURS DIED...



...EXCEPT THE CANS. THEIR SILI-PUTER BRAINS WERE REPROGRAMMED, MAKING THEM MORE SELF-SUFFICIENT...ABLE EVEN TO EVOLVE. AS THEY ADAPTED THEMSELVES TO THE ENVIRONMENT, THEY BECAME CAPABLE OF INTERNAL SELF-REPLICATION.

WHAT GOOD DID ANY OF IT DO US?
WHAT GOOD DID IT DO ME...THE LAST OF THE DEAD?!

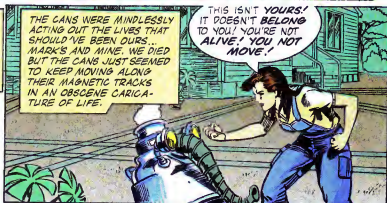
THEY COULD HAVE BABIES, BUT WE COULDN'T.



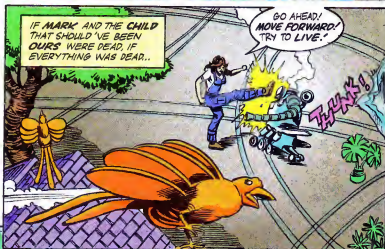
THE DAMN BIMPS-- LUDICROUS THINGS. NOTHING WE DID COULD STOP THE INFECTION THEY GAVE US. IT WASN'T THEIR FAULT, BUT I HATED THEM ANYWAY.



AND THE CANS' EVERYONE HAD THOUGHT OF THE CANS AS INNOCENTS' WELL, WHAT THE HELL DID IT MATTER TO BE INNOCENT? WE WERE INNOCENT! WE WERE DEAD! I WAS DEAD! WHY WEREN'T THE CANS DEAD, TOO?



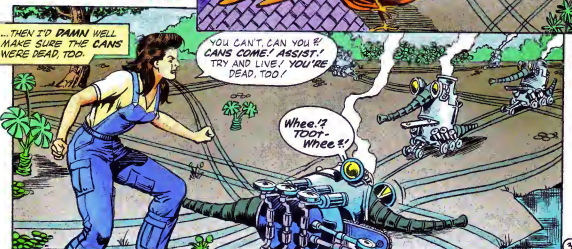
THE CANS WERE MINDLESSLY ACTING OUT THE LIVES THAT SHOULD'VE BEEN OURS... MARK'S AND MINE. WE DIED BUT THE CANS JUST SEEMED TO KEEP MOVING ALONG THEIR MAGNETIC TRACKS IN AN OBSCENE CARICATURE OF LIFE.



IF MARK AND THE CHILD THAT SHOULD'VE BEEN OURS WERE DEAD, IF EVERYTHING WAS DEAD...

GO AHEAD! MOVE FORWARD! TRY TO LIVE!

THANK!



...THEN I'D DAMN WELL MAKE SURE THE CANS WERE DEAD, TOO.

YOU CAN'T, CAN YOU? CANS COME! ASSIST! TRY AND LIVE! YOU'RE DEAD, TOO!

Wheee-? TOOT- Wheee-?

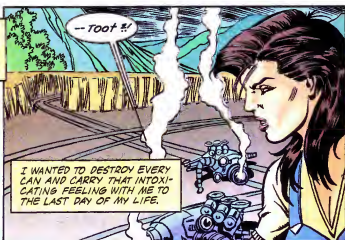


IT WAS LIKE NOTHING I'D EVER FELT IN MY LIFE... TO FINALLY SEE SOMETHING MORE HELPLESS THAN US... DYING MACHINES INSTEAD OF DYING PEOPLE.

CANS COME!
... COME! GO! ... GO NOWHERE!

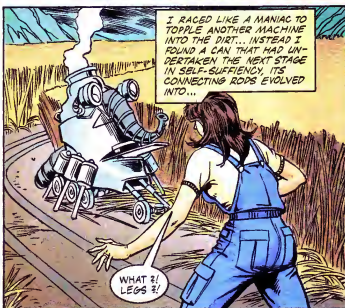
Toot!

Whee...



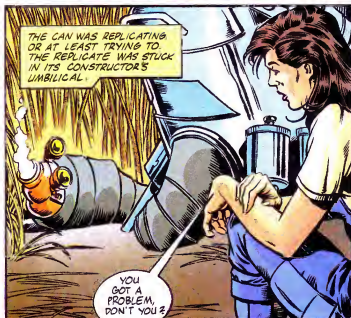
-- Toot ?!

I WANTED TO DESTROY EVERY CAN AND CARRY THAT INTOXICATING FEELING WITH ME TO THE LAST DAY OF MY LIFE.



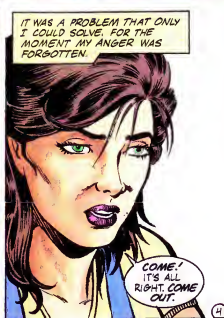
I RACED LIKE A MANIAC TO TOPPLE ANOTHER MACHINE INTO THE DIRT... INSTEAD I FOUND A CAN THAT HAD UNDERTAKEN THE NEXT STAGE IN SELF-SUFFICIENCY, ITS CONNECTING RODS EVOLVED INTO...

WHAT ?!
LEGS ?!



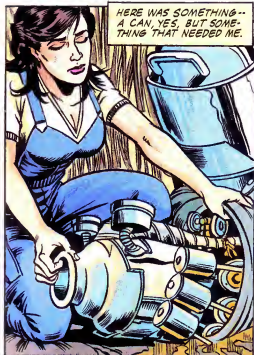
THE CAN WAS REPLICATING OR AT LEAST TRYING TO. THE REPLICATE WAS STUCK IN ITS CONSTRUCTOR'S UMBILICAL.

YOU GOT A PROBLEM, DON'T YOU ?

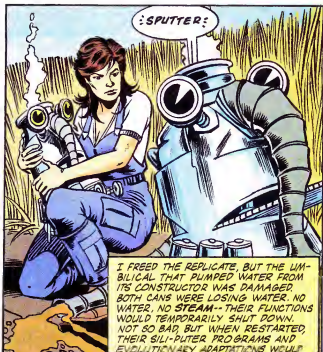


IT WAS A PROBLEM THAT ONLY I COULD SOLVE. FOR THE MOMENT MY ANGER WAS FORGOTTEN.

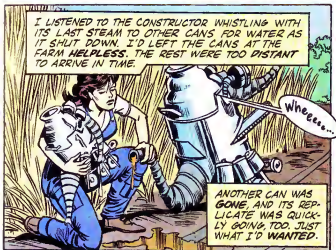
COME!
IT'S ALL RIGHT, COME OUT.



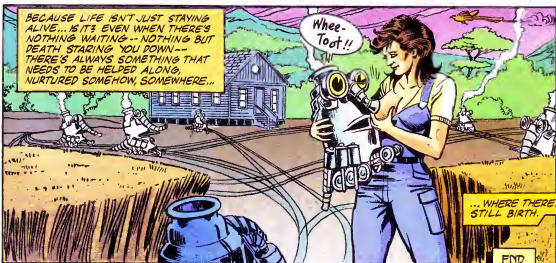
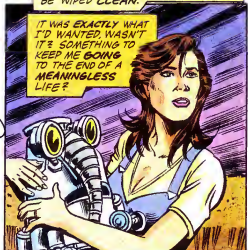
HERE WAS SOMETHING--
A CAN, YES, BUT SOME-
THING THAT NEEDED ME.



I FREED THE REPLICATE, BUT THE LIM-
BICAL THAT PUMPED WATER FROM
ITS CONSTRUCTOR WAS DAMAGED.
BOTH CANS WERE LOSING WATER. NO
WATER, NO STEAM-- THEIR FUNCTIONS
WOULD TEMPORARILY SHUT DOWN.
NOT SO BAD, BUT WHEN RESTARTED,
THEIR SILI-PUTER PROGRAMS AND
EVOLUTIONARY ADAPTATIONS WOULD
BE WIPE CLEAN.



ANOTHER CAN WAS
GONE, AND ITS RE-
PLICATE WAS QUICK-
LY GOING, TOO. JUST
WHAT I'D WANTED.



END.